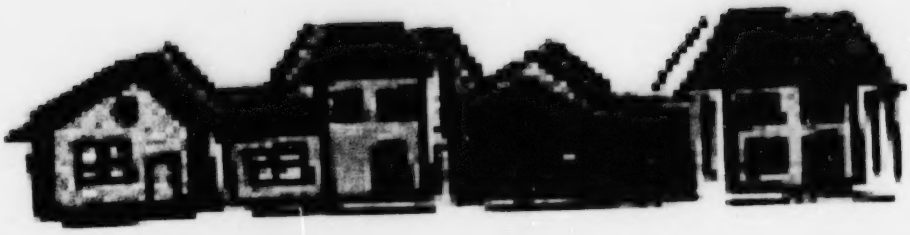
The Future for Housing



The Future for Housing

In August 2000, the responsibility for Housing in the province was moved from the Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs to the Department of Community Services. This represented the third change in department in the last 6 years. This change also represents an opportunity to increase synergies in the social policy arena and to renew the Housing Division and the Housing Authorities.

We have taken advantage of this change to look to the future and to develop a vision of where we should be. The results of this look forward are a new vision and mission, belief statements to guide us and new high level goals.

A FACT: Housing is a basic need and fundamental to personal well being.

Vision

Working from this fact, our Vision for housing is focused on the people and communities of Nova Scotia. It includes all the organizations, governments and individuals who can help improve housing in the province.

Our Vision focuses on all aspects of housing in Nova Scotia. We must understand both the positive and negative impacts housing has on communities and individuals. In particular we need to understand its impacts on poverty and on a person's health. Our Vision is about using housing as part of the government's move to helping people become self-sufficient and to contribute to the health and sustainability of communities.

To improve housing and the health of our communities, we will need to partner with all groups and individuals able to help. In government, we will need to bring focus and coordination to housing initiatives.

The Vision also looks at our whole Housing organization. We want to be a leader in the country in terms of the effectiveness and creativity in the tools we use to improve housing in Nova Scotia.

Mission, Beliefs and Goals

As addressed in our Vision, to be effective, we must be focused and coordinate all our housing resources. Housing Services and Housing Authorities must be committed to the same vision, the same mission and the same goals. Thus, the Vision, Mission, Beliefs and Goals were developed together and apply to both organizations.

Our Mission statement, our Beliefs statements and our Goals are designed to bring about our Vision.

Housing's Mission:

> **To be a partner to Nova Scotians in fostering healthy communities through housing.**

The Mission statement clearly recognizes that we cannot achieve our Vision by ourselves. We must partner to succeed. It also recognizes that housing is a significant contributor to the health of our communities and our personal well being. The definition of communities is very broad – it includes the province, our cities and towns, our rural and coastal communities, the streets we live on, our homes and the people in these homes.

Our Beliefs

Because we recognize that housing is a basic human need and fundamental to personal well being:

> **We believe in using housing to foster safe, sustainable and participatory communities.**
>
> **We believe everyone should have access to safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing.**
>
> **We believe in a coordinated approach to delivering housing solutions to Nova Scotians.**
>
> **We believe in empowering people, the value of partnering, relationships based on mutual respect and accountability in pursuing housing solutions.**

These beliefs will guide our discussions, our approaches and our decisions.

Housing's Goals

> **To foster <u>healthy communities</u> through housing.**
>
> **To ensure a <u>supply</u> of safe, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing for Nova Scotians.**
>
> **To optimize <u>access</u> to safe, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing.**
>
> **To be the <u>co-ordinating</u> agency for all government housing initiatives in Nova Scotia.**

The Goals summarize what we need to do to give life to our Mission and to achieve our Vision. The focus is on Healthy Communities and how housing contributes to a community's health.

To have a healthy community, there must be a supply of safe, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing. Through partnerships, our Goal is to ensure communities have the needed supply of housing.

Simply supplying safe, appropriate, affordable housing, by itself, is not enough. We must work to ensure that Nova Scotians have access to this housing. The barriers to access including prejudice and information about where the housing is located must be eliminated. Other barriers to access such as transportation will also be targeted under our Goals.

The Goals also address the need for all levels of governments to adopt a coordinated approach to housing related initiatives in the province to achieve maximum benefits. In essence, we want to create a bigger bang for every dollar spent on housing. Without it, our effectiveness will be reduced.

Summary

The challenges we face are significant. The issues we must tackle are complicated and they touch upon the lives of all Nova Scotians. Our Vision of the future is clear. We must be focused on healthy communities. We must work together, in partnership, to ensure that our communities are healthy.

To achieve our Vision we must:

- be focused;
- clearly define our priorities and allocate resources to carry them out;
- be willing to change and to accept and develop new ideas and ways of doing our work;
- be committed to our Beliefs and "walk the talk; and,
- work together with a spirit of openness and respect for each other.

We must be successful.

Background

On August 1, 2000 as part of the government's reorganization, the Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs was unbundled, its key program areas dispersed in two directions. The former Municipal Affairs component and the Department of Business and Consumer Services were combined to create Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. The Housing component became a division of the Department of Community Services.

The Housing Services Division currently operates grant and loan programs, oversees the management of 22,000 social housing units, and develops and sells land. It administers the Housing Act and is responsible for legislation governing the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation.

Housing Authorities throughout the province act as property managers for provincial public housing. Their boards deal with tenant issues.

Here are some dimensions relative to the Nova Scotia housing scene:

> There were approximately 340,000 occupied dwellings in the province in 1996: 240,000 (70%) are owner occupied and 100,000 (30%) are tenant occupied. More than 70% of the province's households are homeowners, one of the highest rates in the country. Based on 1998 data, 52% of homeowners did not have a mortgage. (Statistics Canada)
>
> In 1996, 11% or 37,000 occupied dwellings in the province were in need of major repairs including 27,000 owner occupied dwellings and 10,000 tenant occupied dwellings. (Statistics Canada)
>
> 8,300 households living in owner occupied dwellings and 4,700 households living in tenant occupied dwelling units had incomes in 1996 of less than $20,000. In terms of occupied dwellings in need of major repairs, 30% of all the households living in owner occupied dwellings and 50% of all the households living in tenant occupied dwellings had an annual income of less than $20,000 in 1996. (Statistics Canada)

There are more statistics and information about housing and Nova Scotia which could be added to this discussion. There is much information on the level of poverty in the province and Canada, the benefits of home ownership, the challenges faced by people as they get older and the effects that changing demographics will have on government services, the workforce and where people choose to live. The challenges facing housing are significant and complex. We recognize that we cannot stand still or continue to use the approaches and programs of the past to improve housing and thus the lives and health of Nova Scotians and their communities.

102-04087/

Vision

Within this context, staff from all Housing Authorities and the Housing Services Division undertook to look into the future and develop our Vision of what we would like to see. We recognized that to get to our Vision, Housing Services and Housing Authorities need to have the same mission, the same beliefs and goals. We must coordinate our activities and have the same focus. To this end, we have chosen to use the term "Housing" to describe Housing Services and Housing Authorities.

Housing's visioning sessions were used to identify the landscape we would like to see when we look into the future. We asked ourselves some simple questions: "*If you could roll the clock forward 5 years or so, to a time when all of the changes about to be planned have been implemented, in the best of all possible worlds, what do you see for the future of housing in Nova Scotia? What will be going on?*"

Our answers to these questions are written in the present tense as if they have already been accomplished. We understand the challenges involved in getting to this vision and the significance of what we are presenting as the vision. To accomplish what we have outlined will require fundamental change to our organization, to our means of operating, to our mind set and to our focus.

It is the Year 2006. Nationally, we're considered a leader in our business. The number of Nova Scotians who are safely, affordability and appropriately housed has been increased dramatically from the turn of the century. In fact, we share the conviction of the United Nations that access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing should be a basic right. Our aim is for Nova Scotians to embrace this principle.

We've achieved a holistic view of housing that goes well beyond the limits of what we were traditionally expected or empowered to do. Our role and the scope of our activities, strategic and working relationships have been expanding. We have become significantly more effective as a result.

We have a better understanding of how housing contributes to alleviating problems associated with poverty.

Using housing (in its broadest sense) we are an active partner with others doing community development work so as to foster healthy communities. We have people skilled in community development and in connecting with communities.

Housing that we fund is viewed less as an end result; increasingly we use housing as a means to self-sufficiency.

We are the co-ordinating agency responsible for all governmental funds spent on shelter in Nova Scotia; ensuring the effective and efficient utilization of resources formerly controlled by other government departments.

We have strong, mutually supportive partnerships with everyone in a position to help with housing; partners at all levels of government, in the private sector, in the non-profit sector and especially with those whom we serve in the community. In co-operation with partners such as Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Housing Industry and the Community College system, we work to ensure that there is a skilled residential construction industry workforce.

People look to us for advice on current and new housing technology.

We stimulate and partner on Nova Scotia housing research with academic institutions and other research-oriented agencies.

People now understand and value what it is that we do. We partner with others to provide housing education and counselling with a view to enabling Nova Scotians to participate in decisions affecting their housing. Barriers to service access have been eliminated through improved public awareness. Our identity is clear to all.

We appreciate and can communicate the unique needs associated with Nova Scotia's housing profile. We leverage this to influence everyone in a position to help with housing. We actively promote housing consumer protection. Municipalities have been encouraged to eliminate barriers to the supply of safe, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing. Influencing policy at all levels, we have addressed negative effects of urban development in rural areas, consistent with our long range goals. We're constantly watching for synergies, with other Atlantic provinces, on common goals. Nova Scotia's unique requirements are reflected in our approach to national housing issues. We track opportunities with all of our partners and advocate for new and alternate funding sources. Our cost effectiveness allows us to argue for wise government decisions.

Planning has become a core strength. We are able to anticipate and plan for multi-year needs, enabling us to develop viable programs. Profiles of all our non-profit and public housing are maintained electronically. Technology including a geographic information system makes it easier to track the condition of our housing stock and analyze community needs and future changes. We can demonstrate significant results against our plans because we have robust user-friendly systems to monitor and benchmark our performance against others.

We're proud of our effectiveness on behalf of our clients. The stigma associated with public housing has been eliminated. On the basis of ongoing critical review, we allocate housing resources according to agreed short and long-term priorities. Land resources are used to catalyse sound decisions in support of affordable housing and appropriate solutions. We set high standards through "state of the art" design of our facilities and encourage the residential construction industry to utilize best practices in the building and renovating of housing stock. We help seniors meet the challenge of aging where they choose to age.

Both public and private housing are part of sustainable communities. We sustain and support co-op and non–profit housing that is viable. In fact, *all* existing housing stocks in

Nova Scotia are stabilized, maintained and sustained. The municipalities and the province no longer allow unsafe housing to be occupied. Indoor air quality concerns are being addressed. Every Nova Scotian has potable water and indoor plumbing.

Our service quality is continuously improving. Our processes have been streamlined to complement our improved understanding of what clients say they need. Technology is a key enabler. We've worked hard to improve access by facilitating one-stop shopping. We have the resources to respond to short and long-term housing needs as Nova Scotians express them. We're flexible and responsive, tailoring our solutions and approaches to client-defined needs. As a result, if you qualify for one of our programs or services, you will not be put on a waiting list. We can house people who are in core need within a time frame that would have been thought unattainable five years ago.

We can access the skills and expertise needed to support our evolving plans. Our staff has been key to all our successes. We support them in their development and education so as to maximize their contributions. They can move freely in the organization to take on new challenges. We have steadily strengthened our human resource capacity through effective recruitment, development and retention strategies. The array of core competencies has evolved to leverage our strategic directions. Housing research is one of these. You will also see people who are effective in their communication and with highly developed negotiation skills. It has been a deliberate strategy to supplement our experience with fresh, innovative ideas and abilities.

We are leaders in the housing industry. We actively learn from others. Our ability to find or develop best practices in housing enables us to be accountable, dealing from a position of strength and credibility. Informed people will say that housing quality has improved significantly compared to 2001, due in large part to our efforts and those of our partners.

Summary

As we can see the Vision is very broad and very challenging to accomplish. We will have to be continuously focused on where we want to be and all our collective efforts will need to be directed to achieving our Vision.

Housing's Mission:

To be a partner to Nova Scotians in fostering healthy communities through housing.

Beliefs:

Because we recognize that housing is a basic human need and fundamental to personal well being:

We believe in using housing to foster safe, sustainable and participatory communities.

We believe everyone should have access to safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing.

We believe in a coordinated approach to delivering housing solutions to Nova Scotians.

We believe in empowering people, the value of partnering, relationships based on mutual respect and accountability in pursuing housing solutions.

Goals:

To foster healthy communities through housing.

To ensure a supply of safe, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing for Nova Scotians.

To optimize access to safe, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing.

To be the co-ordinating agency for all government housing initiatives in Nova Scotia.